

**BEFORE THE PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION  
OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA**



**FILED**

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Order Instituting Rulemaking Into  
Implementation of Federal Communications  
Commission Report and Order 04-87, as It  
Affects the Universal Lifeline Telephone  
Service Program.

Rulemaking 04-12-001  
(Filed December 2, 2004)

**JOINT COMMENTS OF SAN DIEGO GAS & ELECTRIC COMPANY AND  
SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA GAS COMPANY TO THE ASSIGNED COMMISSIONER'S  
RULING SETTING SCOPE OF PHASE 2 ON IMPROVING THE CALIFORNIA  
LIFELINE CERTIFICATION AND VERIFICATION PROCESSES**

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December 14, 2007

**JOINT COMMENTS OF SAN DIEGO GAS & ELECTRIC COMPANY AND  
SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA GAS COMPANY TO THE ASSIGNED COMMISSIONER'S  
RULING SETTING THE SCOPE OF PHASE 2 ON IMPROVING THE CALIFORNIA  
LIFELINE CERTIFICATION AND VERIFICATION PROCESSES**

**INTRODUCTION:**

Pursuant to Rule 6.2 of the California Public Utilities Commission's (Commission) Rules of Practice and Procedure and in accordance with the November 17, 2007 Assigned Commissioner's Ruling soliciting comments on setting the scope of Phase 2 on improving the California LifeLine certification and verification processes, San Diego Gas & Electric Company (SDG&E) and Southern California Gas Company (SoCalGas) (collectively, "the Joint Utilities") file these limited comments on the identified longer-term strategies that may further improve upon the California LifeLine program's efficiencies and effectiveness. The Joint Utilities' Comments address the questions posed by the Commission related to the qualification process for the California LifeLine program, synergies with the other low-income programs, and eligibility for the California LifeLine program.

**JOINT UTILITIES' RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS:**

**1. Should the California LifeLine program be revised to require customers to pre-qualify before being enrolled in the program?**

The Joint Utilities agree with the Commission and see several advantages in moving to a system of customer pre-qualification. With pre-qualification, low-income customers would not receive program benefits when they are not qualified. Pre-qualification would also eliminate the customer financial burden resulting from back-billing.

Requiring pre-qualification for the California LifeLine program applicants better aligns the enrollment process with what the Commission's CARE and LIEE program require and is supportive of achieving synergies across the programs.

The current, Commission-authorized, low-income California Alternate Rates for Energy (CARE) programs of the Investor Owned Utilities (IOUs) require customers to self-certify that

their households qualify for the program prior to enrollment of any customer into the program by the utilities. Customers either self-certify that they are participating in other means-tested state programs (i.e., Food Stamps, TANF, WIC, LIHEAP, Healthy Families A & B) or that their household incomes do not exceed the CARE income eligibility guidelines (200% of Federal Poverty Guidelines (FPG)).<sup>1</sup> The IOUs Low-income Energy Efficiency (LIEE) program requires customers to pre-qualify for the program by providing income documentation if they do not participate in one of the aforementioned means-tested program.

The Joint Utilities believe that implementation of customer pre-qualification could include streamlined processing and expedient service to minimize the time a customer does not receive the California LifeLine program services for which they qualify.

**2a. How are other states using web-based enrollment systems and how could those systems be duplicated for future use in California?**

In researching this question, the Joint Utilities did not find other states certifying or verifying customers into any LifeLine programs online. (See [www.Lifelinesupport.org](http://www.Lifelinesupport.org).) However, the Joint Utilities are implementing an online application process for their CARE programs where self-certification is completed using the utilities' websites. In April 2007, SDG&E began accepting online applications for the CARE program, where customers self-certify their eligibility on the site and the utility enrolls them into the CARE program without requiring a paper application. As of the end of November 2007, 3,309 customers have enrolled in SDG&E's CARE program online. This represents 6.6% of all new enrollments processed by SDG&E in 2007. SDG&E's use of the internet to enroll customers in the CARE program is in large part due to the efforts of its Customer Contact Center representatives, who refer to SDG&E's website potentially eligible customers who express an interest in online enrollment. On December 1, 2007, SoCalGas implemented its online application. As of December 7, 2007, SoCalGas had received 125 online applications. The Joint Utilities strongly support the use of web-based enrollment systems, as it provides customers with an easy and convenient alternative for enrolling in low-income assistance programs.

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<sup>1</sup> The IOUs also offer a LIEE program which has the same eligibility guidelines but requires customers to produce income documentation if they are qualifying based on income.

**2b. Should California move to a strictly program-based eligibility and eliminate the current prong that allows participation in the program based on income level?**

The Joint Utilities believe that low-income customers who can income qualify for the California LifeLine program should not be prevented from obtaining the services because they are not participating in other means-tested programs. Customers who qualify for the California LifeLine program may not qualify for other programs, or may choose not to participate in those other programs. Should the Commission decide to pursue a strictly program-based qualification process, it should evaluate what the impact of implementing such a program would be on customers prior to making that shift. In order to assess that impact, the Commission may want to seek information on how many customers are currently applying for the programs based on income and determine customers' reasons for not participating in other programs. For the Commission to move to a strictly program-based eligibility may unfairly penalize those low-income customers who, for some valid reason, do not participate in other means-tested programs.

**4a. How might the California LifeLine program tie in with other low-income programs?**

The Joint Utilities support the effort to achieve synergy between the California LifeLine program and the utilities' low-income programs and presented information on the issues surrounding achieving those synergies in the ULTS Workshop held by the Commission on June 22, 2005. The primary issues are the differences in eligibility requirements and the data sharing of confidential customer information.

Without further Commission direction in the low-income proceeding, Rulemaking (R.) 07-01-042, the utility CARE and LIEE programs could automatically enroll some California LifeLine customers who participate in certain public assistance programs because they are currently being accepted by the utility programs. Those means-tested programs currently accepted by the utility programs are Medi-Cal, Food Stamps, TANF, WIC, LIHEAP and Healthy Families A&B. Also, those customers who qualify for the California LifeLine program based on income would qualify for the CARE and LIEE programs. Other programs accepted by the California LifeLine program are not accepted by the CARE and LIEE programs for such reasons as the programs are not means tested or the income eligibility is more than the 200% of FPG

allowed for by the CARE and LIEE program guidelines. Any expansion of the income eligibility guidelines requires authorization from the Commission in the low-income proceeding as it increases the cost to other utility ratepayers. Finally, the income guidelines for the California LifeLine program are significantly less than income guidelines for the Joint Utilities' CARE programs so many of the CARE customers do not qualify for the California LifeLine program.

Besides the differences in eligibility requirements between the programs, confidentiality of customer information is another major issue that needs to be addressed before synergies between the California LifeLine program and the energy utilities' programs can be achieved. The utilities ask customers to share their information for enrollment in other utility programs; but, as far as the Joint Utilities know, no such provision is being required of California LifeLine applicants. Furthermore, a possible question to be resolved is whether the term "other utilities" includes telephone carriers.

**4b. Is there some way that a customer can sign up for all low-income programs at the Commission at one time? Would a web-based system be a possible tool?**

A web-based system could be a tool to enroll customers in all Commission-administered low-income programs. Such a system could supplement the existing efforts of the California LifeLine program and the IOU's, as well as those water companies under the jurisdiction of the Commission, to outreach and enroll low-income customers in Commission-administered programs. The system would need to be designed to capture the information required by each of the low-income programs and provide that information to each of them so that qualification and enrollment of customers and follow-up processes (re-certification and verification) can be managed accordingly. The Joint Utilities believe that providing only customer names for enrollment would create operational difficulties.

The Joint Utilities believe that a number of issues revolving around the design of a web-based system would require workshops held by the Commission and attended by the IOUs, the California LifeLine administrator, telephone companies, water companies and interested parties to determine the viability of the concept and other such question as the cost of implementation, best design, and best means of implementing.

**CONCLUSION:**

The Joint Utilities congratulate the Commission on adopting Decision 07-05-030's strategies to improve response rates of the California LifeLine certification and verification processes. The Joint Utilities look forward to working with the Commission and interested parties to develop synergies among the regulated low-income programs.

December 14, 2007

Respectfully submitted by:

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## **CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE**

I hereby certify that a copy of **JOINT COMMENTS OF SAN DIEGO & ELECTRIC COMPANY AND SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA GAS COMPANY TO THE ASSIGNED COMMISSIONER'S RULING SETTING SCOPE OF PHASE 2 ON IMPROVING THE CALIFORNIA LIFELINE CERTIFICATION AND VERIFICATION PROCESSES** has been electronically mailed to each party of record of the service list in R.04-12-001. Any party on the service list who has not provided an electronic mail address was served by placing copies in properly addressed and sealed envelopes and by depositing such envelopes in the United States Mail with first-class postage prepaid.

Copies were also sent via Federal Express to Administrative Law Judge Karen Jones and Commissioner Dian Grueneich.

Executed this 14th day of December , 2007 at San Diego, California.

\_\_\_\_\_/s/ Jenny Tjokro  
Jenny Tjokro



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**[TOP OF PAGE](#)**  
**[BACK TO INDEX OF SERVICE LISTS](#)**